

## **The Inter-Regional Information Society Initiative (IRIS): The Healthcare Working Group**

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### **The IRIS Initiative**

Six regions of Europe are participating to the IRIS Initiative: Nord-Pas de Calais (France), North-West England (U.K.), Saxony, (Germany), Piemonte (Italy), Macedonia (Greece), Valencia Region (Spain). The objective of IRISI is the development of applications of new Information Technologies in the different fields of human activity, from teleworking to tele-education and telemedicine..

Taking into account the different experiences of Telemedicine and the growing potentials of Telecommunications in the Healthcare domain, the Healthcare Working group tries to define some directions for the development of these new information technologies applied to the medical field.

We can consider three levels for the development of Telemedicine:

1. First level: The individual stage when two people communicate for the realisation of a medical activity (tele-consultation, tele-expertise, tele-radiology, tele-surgery...)
2. Second level: The organisational level when two organisations (hospitals, private clinics, primary care units) communicate in an organized manner to exchange data and information for administrative, medical, or financial reasons connected with healthcare problems.
3. Third level: The regional level when there is a policy for the connection of different medical and administrative structures involved in the treatment of patients, but also in preventive actions, and public health. This third level will support a regional healthcare policy for potential benefits in terms of cost savings or improvement of the quality of care.

The objective of the Healthcare Working Group is focused on this third level as we are reasoning at the regional point of view. *We will consider the*

*potentials of new Information Technologies to allow a better access to healthcare, a better information of professionals, of patients, of people, and an improvement of the regional healthcare organisation.*

Many tools are now available: E.D.I., Video-conferencing, desktop-conferencing, co-editors, co-drawings, information servers, workflow products, groupware.... Their integration in the medical organisations and consequently in the medical (or nurses') activities may cause major difficulties or breakdowns that will need strong efforts before any benefits.

Gathering the experience of each region, the working group tries to identify when and where the experiences were beneficial and the reasons for success or failures. The main objective is the definition of common guidelines for the development of Telematics actions in the Healthcare domain, respecting the necessity of a regional structuration of the field.

For this purpose, it was decided to form regional groups where these topics could be discussed at the local level. The results of these discussions and their reports are available for the entire working group through E-Mail and Web-servers. Common meetings are then held to extract guidelines from the regional experiences. When possible, common projects are developed between two or more regions.

The working group evaluates the benefits of Information technologies applied to the communication between healthcare organisations and professionals working together for a better **Continuity of Care**.

### **CONCLUSION**

As the regional level seems the most appropriate for the development of Telemedicine, IRISI is the perfect framework to gather experiences for the 6 participating regions and propose constructive guidelines and recommendations.